

Michigan World Usability Day Encourages Attendees to “Design for the Future We Want”

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EAST LANSING, Mich. – MSU Usability/Accessibility Research and Consulting (UARC) hosted the 17th annual Michigan World Usability Day event at Michigan State University on Thursday, November 14.

A crowd of more than 300 people from government, industry, and academia came to learn from user experience thought leaders. The international theme for WUD 2019 was “Design for the Future We Want.”

“This year's theme emphasized understanding the experience of users and encouraging practitioners to design responsibly and accessibly,” said Sarah Swierenga, MSU UARC Director. “Our speakers presented excellent topical information that applies to the challenges faced by industry and academic professionals, government leaders, and students.”



Michigan State University hosted its initial event in 2003, when user experience and user-centered design were emerging as essential components of web design and information technology.

Carol Smith, Gearing up for Ethnography

Carol Smith is a Senior Research Scientist in Human-Machine Interaction at Carnegie Mellon University's Software Engineering Institute, and she's also an adjunct instructor for CMU's Human-Computer Interaction Institute (HCII). She has been conducting UX research for over 18 years, including most recently at Uber and IBM. Carol talked about her personal experiences conducting ethnographic research in the field.

“When we're doing work in a new space, the best thing we can do is get out of our offices and observe the people we're developing products for. Ethnographic research provides us with comprehensive early learning that benefits our team's knowledge and the resulting experience,” said Smith.

According to Smith, “Ethics are core to UX research as our participants are trusting us with full access. We have a responsibility to keep that trust and protect our participants. UX research is my favorite part of my job - getting to learn from observing people in their environment is endlessly interesting.”

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Phillip Tularak, Project to Product: Leveraging UX to Deliver Value

Phillip Tularak is the User Experience manager at Thomson Reuters, where he leads a team that's focused on delivering the next-generation of "software as a service"-based tax and accounting tools.

He discussed lessons learned in living through digital transformation processes and how user experience design is well-positioned to help organizations transform from project-focused to product-focused.

"Moving from an organization that comes from a project-based mindset to a product-based mindset is challenging. User Experience professionals are well positioned to help those organizations make the shift. However, it will be difficult to do so without knowing what business they're in and what their stakeholders care about. Communication is key, and communicating with business acumen is essential," said Tularak.

Sarah Swierenga, Real-World Accessibility: Disabilities and Usability

Sarah Swierenga, PhD, CPE, is the Director of MSU UARC and has more than 25 years of experience in the scientific study of users in commercial, government, healthcare, military, and academic environments. She shared insights and experiences her team has gained from working with clients who want to include the voice of diverse users in their design processes.

"Your team is responsible for testing accessibility, so that your participants are testing the user experience," said Swierenga. "Usability testing will not tell you whether the website meets legal requirements – it is not an audit." She encouraged teams "to try including individuals with disabilities when conducting usability testing to gain valuable insights and better designs."

Jennifer Atanasovski, Using Contextual Shifts to Design with Intent

Jennifer Atanasovski is a Customer and Industry Research Pathfinder at Ford Motor Company. She spoke about how we need to understand contextual shifts over time to discern relevant trends and to go deeper in understanding the "why" of things - if we are to design our future.

"It is important for UX designers to understand people so well and the world they live in, and then translate and communicate that emotion through design that incites action," said Jennifer.

"Because behavior does not determine what we design for people. Behavior is the result of the tools and environment we create for people. Looking only at behavior helps inform us of what is and what is not working right now. It helps us understand what people are experiencing that they don't know how to vocalize. What we must understand is their context and deeper "why" as that's what drives those behaviors – and that is far more important."

Christopher Patten, Influencer Secrets 101: Government Edition

Christopher Patten is a Design Researcher at the Center for Civic Design, where he works to build support and get buy-in for implementing best design practices in government websites. He discussed working with government officials on state election websites.

"Now more than ever we need good designers willing to work in government. Doing this work well requires building relationships with all levels of staff. While this often means you'll be doing

more facilitating than solitary design work, you'll be able to influence a way of working that lasts long after your project is over," said Patten.

Michigan World Usability Day Sponsors and Affiliates

MSU UARC was joined by several sponsors to make the event possible, including TechSmith, A.J. Boggs & Company, MSU College of Arts and Letters, MSU College of Communication Arts and Sciences, MSU Department of Media and Information, MSU Experience Architecture Program, MSU Office for Inclusion and Intercultural Initiatives, and MSU University Outreach and Engagement.

Event affiliates included Detroit UX, Michigan UXPA, Metro Detroit WordPress Meetup, Refresh Detroit, and West Michigan Shores - Society for Technical Communication.

More information is available at <https://uarc.msu.edu/wud2019>.

Twitter hashtags #MiWUD and #WUD2019

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